



Peace begins when you make your peace with Jesus, accept Him as Savior and follow Him as Lord.

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A Significant Change of Mind and Heart

In a time when incidents of mass violence and violence by the police whose job it is to 'keep the peace' are almost constantly in the news, there have been some notable events:

- One happened in January 2014 when, during the funeral for his daughter Claire, Michael Davis forgave the shooter who killed her. Claire was killed in a shooting at Arapahoe High School in Centennial, Colorado.
- Another happened in March 2015. The National Latino Evangelical Coalition (NaLEC) announced that it "would no longer support the death penalty, making it the first U.S. evangelical association to take this stand." Gabriel Salguero, the Coalition president, made the announcement in Orlando, Florida and urged the 3,000 NaLEC congregations to work to end capital punishment nationwide. Salguero said, "As Christ-followers, we are called to work toward justice for all. And as Latinos, we know too well that justice is not always even-handed."

The NaLEC spent two years in prayer and study before making this decision. They were in conversation with Equal Justice USA and the Constitution Project, two anti-death penalty groups. They also talked to a number of wrongfully convicted former prisoners who have been exonerated after spending long years in prison for crimes they did not commit.

The Coalition made their announcement in Florida because Florida was the first state to resume executions after the 1972 moratorium on capital punishment was struck down by the Supreme Court and because 25 people on death row in Florida have been exonerated – more than in any other state.

153 people have been exonerated in the U.S. since 1973. The 'justice system' is full of errors, mishandled cases, and an inadequate defense provided for many – especially for minority defendants and the poor. The death penalty is used in a very haphazard manner. Salguero said, "human beings are fallible and there is no room for fallibility in matters of life and death." Salguero also said, "We are pro-life. We have a womb-to-tomb theology." "It's time to end this abuse of government power instead of standing idly by and tolerating it."¹ The number of innocent people convicted is unacceptable.

- A third event to note is the murder of 9 people at a prayer meeting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. This shooting shocked the nation in part because the shooter spent time with the people at the prayer meeting before opening fire. The national reaction to the decision of victim's families to publicly forgive the shooter at his first court appearance also stunned many. In an era when calls for swift punishment – including the death penalty – are all too often heard loud and strong after similar incidents, many in the media and the nation did not know what to say when 'victim's families turned to Jesus' example and offered forgiveness not calls for revenge to the one who killed their loved ones.²

There is a line between revenge and justice which has become blurred or forgotten in much of America. In fact, these two concepts

are not the same, though many people seem to think they are. Revenge repays a wrong with more wrong – sometimes a greater wrong than was done in the first place – especially when those harmed in the name of revenge are innocent. . . . Revenge allows emotions to take over judgment. This means the ability to review and evaluate a situation and the ability to consider the consequences of the actions taken is lost. Vigilante lynching, or mob attacks, are often revenge driven. A swat-team 'take down' or a law requiring 'swift punishment' for 'convicted' persons can also be revenge driven and have nothing to do with justice. Meeting violence with violence – whether it is a mob or government authorities doing so, means those responding with violence are imitating the violence they agree was wrong rather than demonstrating something better. Two wrongs do not make a right.

Justice can mean bringing an accused wrongdoer to be tried in court and, if guilty, 'duly punishing' them according to the law. Justice can also mean acting impartially and fairly. However, the idea of seeking justice assumes that people are able to figure out what the truth is and will be able to act impartially and fairly. As the NaLEC discovered, this is not always what happens. Determining the truth is not always possible. When the desire for 'punishment' gets in the way of fairness revenge can take over. When the 'rights' of a victim are considered greater than the rights of an accused person, revenge can takeover. When the life of an accused person is seen as being less valuable than the life of a victim, revenge can take over.

God did not say that only perfect people are his children! Jesus rejected the eye-for-an-eye 'justice' that was the thinking in His day. He knew and tried to teach what people continue to struggle to see to this day – that repeating the same harm to a wrong doer that the wrong doer caused does not make things 'right' again for anyone. It only doubles the harm and multiplies the suffering many fold. Seeking a better way is what Jesus calls his followers to. The goal of faithful discipleship is to love as Jesus loved and restore wholeness where brokenness has occurred – wither it is seeking and offering forgiveness after a disagreement with a friend or responding to a violent act that has caused great harm with forgiveness and mercy.

Killing one who has committed a crime – even a murder is still taking a life. It eliminates the possibility for the wrong doer to repent and be able to make amends for the wrong they caused. Killing an accused person eliminates the possibility of making things right if that accused person is actually innocent. The NaLEC has now acknowledged that. The families who have been able to forgive the one who killed their loved ones have taken to heart the words of Jesus are trying to put the love of Jesus into action. They are trying to end the cycle of wrong. Only that will bring peace to them and to our society.

¹Rios, Elizabeth D... "Latino Evangelicals Say No to the Death Penalty". *Sojourners*. July 2015, p. 10.

²The Charleston congregation continues struggling with the shooting aftermath. See "After Shooting, Varying Shades of Recovery at Charleston Church". *The Huffington Post* for an update.

Remembering Hiroshima & Nagasaki

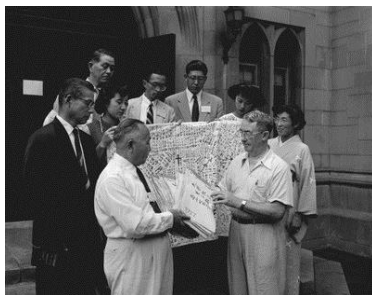


Candle lanterns drift downstream August 6, 2015, Hiroshima, Japan, in front of the city's atomic bomb dome. Photo: Paul Jeffrey/WCC

A delegation from the World Council of Churches (WCC) made a pilgrimage to Hiroshima and Nagasaki to seek action to end nuclear threats on the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings of those cities

by the U.S. at the end of World War II. The two cities were attacked with atomic bombs on Aug. 6 and 9, 1945. The delegation came to listen to the voice of the hibakusha – those who survived the bombs and renew the struggle against their own countries' continued reliance on nuclear weapons. Bishop Swenson, vice-moderator of the WCC Central Committee said: "We come to remember and to acknowledge the devastation of the past and to say, 'Never again.'" The church leaders came from the United States, Germany, South Korea, Japan, Norway, Pakistan and the Netherlands – all countries possessing nuclear weapons or living under the United States nuclear umbrella. 70 years after the horrendous destructive power of atomic weapons was revealed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 40 governments still rely on nuclear weapons. Nine states possess nuclear arsenals and 31 other states are willing to have the United States use nuclear weapons on their behalf. Bishop Swenson added: "It is time to judge armaments and energy use by their effects on people and on God's creation. It is time to confess that our desire for material comfort and convenience insulates us from the concern for the source and quantity of the energy we consume. It is time to abandon all support for retaining nuclear weapons. It is time to refuse to accept that the mass destruction of other people can be a legitimate form of protection of ourselves." The anti nuclear voices of the hibakusha, which, for the Japanese now include those affected by the Fukushima disaster, are being silenced by age and time. The participants in the WCC pilgrimage are calling for the churches to take up their cause and work for an end to nuclear weapons. Other weapons of mass destruction are already under legal ban – cluster bombs, land mines, chemical weapons. It is long past time for nuclear weapons to also be banned. The WCC delegates are also working to engage the leaders of their own countries in dialog which they hope will bring a ban on nuclear weapons. This humanitarian initiative already has the support of 110 countries. Find out more at www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/nuclear-arms-control.

Nine years after the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japanese Christians presented a peace petition at the WCC assembly in Evanston, United States, 1954. The Assembly appealed to governments of the world to prohibit all weapons of mass destruction and to abstain from aggression. This year's WCC pilgrimage is a continuation of this effort.



Sources: Newsline 7-2-2015. WCC website: www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/nuclear-arms-control. "WCC Pilgrims Remember Atom Bomb's Deadly Destruction 0 Years Ago in Hiroshima"; "At UN, Anti-nuclear Majorities Challenge Nuclear-dependant Minority".

U.S. Has a Dubious Honor

The United States was one of the countries that helped to draft the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* but the United States is now the only United Nations member nation that has not ratified it! The U.S. president has signed it, but the U.S. congress has still not ratified the convention. Somalia became the 196th nation to ratify the Convention on October 1, 2015 leaving the U.S. as the only holdout nation. "The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child explains that the Convention, adopted in 1989, 'is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty [.] It] sets out a number of children's rights including the right to life, to health, to education and to play, as well as the right to family life, to be protected from violence, to not be discriminated [against], and to have their views heard.'"

Amnesty International reports that the U.S. has not ratified the Convention because conservative organizations including the Christian Coalition, Family Research Council, and Focus on the Family "have made a significant effort to portray the Convention as a threat. The majority of the opposition's claims stem from unfounded concerns related to national sovereignty, states' rights, and the parent-child relationship." These misconceptions about the Convention have caused some notable opposition to ratification in the U.S. Senate which must approve the Convention by a two-thirds vote.

The main legal challenge for U.S ratification is that the U.S. is the only country that still sentences children to life in prison without the possibility of parole. The Convention specifically prohibits this. The U.S. Supreme Court has issued several rulings progressively limiting the use of this sentence against children, but its use should be ended at the federal level and the states that still sentence children this way should end the practice.

Source: Andrea Germanos. "Club of One: US Now Lone UN Member Outside Children's Rights Treaty". *Common Dreams*. October 2, 2015.

Why Mass Shootings?

Adam Lankford, a criminal justice professor at the University of Alabama, presented a paper titled "*Mass Shooters, Firearms, and Social Strains: A Global Analysis of an Exceptionally American Problem*" at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in Chicago in August. Lankford studied mass shootings around the world between 1966 and 2012 and reports the following findings:

- The phenomenon is "a bigger problem today than it was a decade ago and it may be a bigger problem in the future."
- The U.S. has less than 5% of the world's population but had 31% of the mass shootings during the years studied
- In the 46 years studied there were 90 incidents:
 - The U.S. had 36 incidents
 - Philippines 18
 - Russia 15
 - Yemen 11
 - France 10
- Lankford found that "the most consistent connective thread between all of those shootings was firearm ownership". "You can't be in the top five [nations] in firearm ownership and not have this problem."
- Another important factor was reported in a study by the publication *Mother Jones* published in July 2015. Most mass shooters obtained their weapons legally.

- The other important piece Lankford found is that American culture is a significant factor. Many Americans are raised to believe they will be very successful and reach the “American Dream”. When this does not happen – people’s goals are blocked, or they have negative social reactions with peers, coworkers, or bosses, for many particularly high levels of strain result.
- Lankford and others find that “At least one explanation about violence in the U.S. has suggested that ‘crime and deviance occur when there’s an unhealthy gap between people’s dreams and aspirations and their ability to reach those dreams.”

Source: Common Dreams: August 24, 2015; Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 License

“I went into the army believing that if you want peace you must prepare for war. I now believe that if you prepare thoroughly for war, you will get it.”

Sir John Frederick Maurice
(Quoted in the Brethren Church Newsletter, 8-21-2015)

Did You Know, Sending People to Prison Is Making Some People Rich?

Many locations in the country have been choosing to hire private companies to run prisons in their jurisdiction rather than running their own city, county, or state prisons. These private prisons and the companies that support them are for profit enterprises that are in the business to make money – not necessarily to serve the community or rehabilitate inmates and help them return to their families and society. The only way private prison companies can make money is to have large numbers of people in their prisons . . . These companies have great influence, both economic and political, and use their influence to see that society and the ‘laws’ governments pass support mass incarceration. America has more people in prison than any other Western country. Prisons in the U.S cost taxpayers some \$39 billion a year. A lot of this goes to private prison companies.

Many do not agree that mass incarceration will make society a better or safer place. Many do not think it is in the best interest of anyone to turn prisons over to for profit companies. The American Friends Service Committee has launched an online tool to help investors who do not want to support the prison industry determine what companies to avoid investing in. The tool is on line at <http://afsc.org/investigate>. It can scan any list of investments and highlight prison-related companies. It identifies prison management companies and supporting companies that provide the health and food services, private probation, and other supply services that make private prisons possible.

Many criminal justice reformers believe that it is very wrong to profit from the human misery caused by mass incarceration practices. They also will be able to use this new tool to identify where the profits are going as they try to bring reforms in the system. For more information contact Dalit Baum of the American Friends Service Committee 415-400-9370 or DBaum@afsc.org.

Refugees

People with hopes and dreams – for themselves; for their children like everyone – but living with threats of violence . . .

Days of uncertainty and nights of fear

Bombs & rockets exploding; gunmen raids; fighting; neighborhoods turned into battlegrounds; into rubble

Communities destroyed; hunger; homes gone; no work; lives threatened; loved ones lost

Hopelessness; despair; what does the future hold?
For hope; for a future – must leave home? must escape?
Rumors of refuge; stories of hope – are they true – are they false?
Some promise ‘help’ – for a price. . .
Desperation; risking everything required; worth the risk?
Water crossing in leaky boats; overloaded boats; will we make it?
Many don’t. . .
Water rescue? Reaching land?
Wet, cold, with nothing. . .
Immigration rules; road blocks; red tape; border crossings;
Walking
Cold nights on the ground
Walking
Seeking food and water
Walking
Path blocked
Barbed wire camps
Frightened children, tired people, desperation
Police and fences; run and hide; running, walking then wait – for days; for weeks; longer?
Not wanted? Moving north, always north – catch the train? Make the bus? If they come. Are they coming?
Walking, walking, walking
Winter coming – how to keep warm – hungry - sick
Help offered; destination offered but helpers overwhelmed and destinations overwhelmed
Will the walking end in hope? Is a new start possible?
Or will the despair return with a wall and a closed door; with refugee camps; resources gone . . . with deportation back to the violence. . .

Get the Facts

- In 2010 10,000 people a day were displaced. In 2015 there are 45,000 a day.
- There are at least 38 million internally displaced people = people who are still inside their own country but cannot live in their own homes because of the threat of violence, etc.
- There are also at least 20 million refugees = people who have had to flee their own country.
- Half of the displaced people in the world have been displaced for 5 years or more.
- The average refugee spends 7 to 20 years in refugee camps.
- Most want to go home, but the longer they are in camps, the less likely they are to want to go home. Many never can.
- Half of the Syrian people are displaced – most because of the actions of their own government.
- 50 thousand refugees came to the U.S. in 2014.
- There are more unaccompanied children fleeing to the U.S. to escape violence at home now than were coming when the story was in the news in May.

Dr. Elizabeth Ferris, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, Washington D.C. speaking at the Bethany Theological Seminary’s 2015 Presidential Forum: A Pilgrimage of Just Peace.

Worship Resources

Make Prayers for peace part of your worship

Remember in prayer:

1. *People affected by gun violence.*
2. *The Emanuel AME Congregation in Charleston, South Carolina* –the attack on a Bible Study left nine members dead

3. **Mothers & children in prison** – more than 1,000 mothers & their children (infants, toddlers, teens) fleeing violence in their home countries are held in U.S. prisons. More unaccompanied children are seeking safety now than when the story broke in May 2015.
4. **Nigeria:** for the missing school girls missing 1 year as of April 14; EYN, all those affected by the violence
5. **Republic of Congo** – where war continues
6. **People facing torture.**
7. **Those in prison** because of their beliefs.
8. **Those facing execution** – & those willing to execute because they put revenge above redemption & forgiveness
9. **Ukraine** – were political violence continues.
10. **All people in this world who live with war.**
11. **Yemen** & other places where the U.S. regularly launches drone attacks – many attacks hit civilians.
12. **People Displaced** because of war or political unrest.
13. **Veterans'** living with their part in war. 18 U.S. Iraq/Afghanistan veterans commit suicide every day. (US Veterans Affairs statistics)
14. **Families of all people killed** in Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran.
15. All those whose lives are dominated by **fear**.
16. People **working for peace** locally and in the world.
17. Those who **do not know the peace of God** in their lives and so have lost sight of hope and joy.
18. **Girls & Women** facing abuse and violence every day
19. **Child Soldiers**
20. **Community – Police issues**, that communities and police will work together respectfully with each other for the common good.
21. **Those now waging war by remote control** – those who push buttons from far away that hurt or killed men, women, children
22. **Syrian refugee crises** – 220,000 Syrians fled to Europe in October 2015 – the same number who came in all of 2014.
23. **Those living with gang violence** – like 9-year-old Tyshawn Lee who was executed by a gang in Chicago

Life & Dignity

It is easy for most people to value life and call for protecting life when a baby or young child is involved. It is easy to talk about and value seeking the best future possible when your family and friends future is at stake. It is easy to value, even consider heroic a willingness to 'move heaven and earth' when it helps your children.

Why do people find this same valuing of life and respectful empathy so much more difficult when the lives of strangers – especially those we perceive as different from ourselves are at stake?

In the news for weeks now have been stories of hundreds of men, women, and children at a time dying as they attempt to flee their home countries where war, internal upheaval, or economic disaster are making life extremely difficult if not impossible. Thousands are risking everything to seek a better life for their families only to find themselves forced to live in limbo behind barbed wire in refugee camps or in detention facilities, sometimes without even basic necessities that make life possible let alone in any way pleasant.

The situation is made even worse by people willing to profit from the situation of desperate people by offering them 'help' for a fee. . . These human traffickers care little for the people once the money's in their pocket. This is obvious when unseaworthy over crowded boats sink, and people suffocate to death in sealed trucks. . .

For years now we have done our best to ignore the stories of struggling fleeing people when 'our country' has been their destination, or when our government's policies or our own lifestyle and economic

choices may contribute to the conditions that cause people to flee their homes to seek safety and a better life.

The problems that cause the violence, wars, or economic conditions that cause people to flee their homes are not new. They are also not simple or easily solved. There are most certainly few people who would chose to leave their homes if there was a way for them to stay and live in safety, with dignity, with basic needs met, and with the opportunity for life to be good for their families.

There are things that must be done to eliminate the reasons people become refugees but they are not easy fixes.

- We must truly value all life. If we do, we will work to make the changes that must be made in our ways of living and looking at the world that will end the causes of violence – hunger, hopelessness, loss of dignity, lack of a say in one's future, poverty, domination, greed. . .
- We must learn that a society based on unlimited consumption is unjust and not sustainable for any people. For one thing, unlimited consumption assumes that it is acceptable for some people to be poor so that others can be wealthy.
- We must start making our own life-style choices with the people of the rest of the world in mind. Are the things we "*want*" more important than the things other people "*need*" to survive?
- We must stop the arms trade. The U.S. and Russia provide more arms than anyone else to the rest of the world. Both nations must stop allowing the manufacturing and sale of arms and military equipment to be a main player in their economies. Economies dependant on war are not sustainable.
- It is each person's responsibility to know their neighbors needs and desires – both the neighbors who live next door and those who live on the other side of the earth. Each person must help find ways to meet those needs and honor those desires.

Get the Facts

The U.S. Government does not keep statistics on how many people are killed by police in the U.S. The Guardian has begun keeping a record under the heading "The Counted" and publishing it on the web. The website is: www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database.

They include the names of those killed, how they died, what day, and what state. Pictures are included when available. Statistics are given by state, race of those killed and other data.



See specific articles for related resource information.

Resource on Nigeria For Children

"Children of the Same Mother: A Nigeria Activity Book." This activity book helps Brethren children in the United States learn about Nigeria as a country and EYN (the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) in particular. As young and old people learn about the struggles and hopes of brothers and sisters far away, they see how they are truly family in Christ Jesus. This resource, available from Brethren Press, is geared for children in grades 3 through 6.



Linda Fry, District Peace Advocate

Church of the Brethren, Northern Ohio District
492 Connor Drive, Mansfield, OH 44905
(419) 589-7719 ✉ ccseven@embarqmail.com